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**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES THREE INDICTMENTS
RELATED TO THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN**

FRESNO—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Fresno returned indictments in three cases charging defendants with crimes relating to the sexual exploitation of children.

United States Attorney Scott noted that, "The indictments returned today are excellent examples of ongoing partnerships between federal and local investigators that will only be strengthened in future investigations. We are committed to doing all we can to safeguard our children" The indictments were returned against RAYMOND WILLIAM RONELL, Jr, 42, of Fresno; MICHAEL PATRICK BRAZIL, 50, of Visalia; and LUIS THOMAS GONTIZ, 19, of Fresno.

According to Assistant United States Attorney David Gappa, who is prosecuting the case, the indictment against RONELL charges him with three offenses: using a minor to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depictions of that conduct, for which he faces a potential prison term of between 15 and 30 years; receipt or distribution of visual depictions of the sexual exploitation of minors, for which he faces a potential prison term of between five and 20 years; and possession of material depicting the sexual exploitation of minors, for which he faces a maximum prison term of 10 years. For each of the three counts in the indictment, he faces a potential maximum fine of \$250,000 and a potential lifetime term of supervised release.

According to a complaint previously filed in the RONELL case, the Fresno Police Department began a child abduction investigation on November 25, 2005, when they were alerted about the disappearance of a twelve-year-old Fresno female. The minor was returned to her home later that day, and RONELL became a suspect in her disappearance. As part of their investigation, detectives examined a digital camera in RONELL's vehicle. They were able to recover previously-deleted sexually explicit images that RONELL had taken of the minor. They also obtained a search warrant for his residence and seized five computer hard drives, various electronic storage media, and other computer media used to store digital images. Subsequent forensic review of that material by Fresno Police Department high-tech investigators revealed several thousand images and/or movie files of child pornography, including images of children

younger than five being sexually abused by adult males. Agents with the Fresno office of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency are working closely with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Alexandria, Virginia to identify previously unknown victims and suspects. RONELL has been detained on state charges since his arrest on November 25, 2005. The Fresno Police Department's Sexual Assault unit continues to investigate this case and asks any member of the public who believes they may have useful information to contact Detective Israel Reyes at 559-621-2484 or, if they wish to remain anonymous, to call the Crime Stoppers tipline at 559-498-7867.

The indictment against BRAZIL charges him with two offenses: receipt or distribution of visual depictions of the sexual exploitation of minors, for which he faces a potential prison term of between five and 20 years; and possession of material depicting the sexual exploitation of minors, for which he faces a maximum prison term of 10 years. For each of the two counts in the indictment, he faces a potential maximum fine of \$250,000 and a potential lifetime term of supervised release.

According to a complaint previously filed in the BRAZIL case, the Tulare Police Department began its investigation in October 2005 when a citizen reported that he had found a computer hard drive and compact discs appearing to contain child pornography hidden in a wall at a business previously operated by BRAZIL. Investigators with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Fresno executed federal search warrants on February 16, 2006, and interviewed BRAZIL. He admitted that he had been obtaining images of the sexual exploitation of minors for at least five years. He also admitted that he was sexually attracted to children and that he had stolen nude photographs of children from friends and scanned them into his computer for later viewing. He admitted that he has a prior conviction in 1987 for sexual battery of a girl in the fourth or fifth grade.

BRAZIL has been in federal custody since his arrest on February 16, 2006, and a detention hearing is scheduled for February 24, 2006. The Tulare Police Department continues to investigate this case and asks any member of the public who believes he may have useful information to contact Detective Brian Haney at 559-685-2300, ext. 2155.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Marianne Pansa, who is prosecuting this case, the indictment against GONTIZ charges him with possession of material depicting the sexual exploitation of minors for which he faces a maximum prison term of 10 years, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a lifetime term of supervised release. According to a complaint previously filed in the case, GONTIZ used the file-sharing program Limewire to obtain images of the sexual exploitation of minors. When a federal search warrant was executed at his residence on February 8, 2006, agents located at least 100 still images and 50 videos, some of which depicted prepubescent girls being sexually abused by adult males. The case was investigated by agents with the Fresno office of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement along with the Fresno County Sheriff's Department's Computer Crimes Unit.

The charges in each indictment are only allegations, and each defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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